



CROUCHING TIGER, HIDDEN DRAGON

Genre : Action Director : Ang Lee Starring : Chow Yun Fat, Michelle Yeoh, Zhang Ziyi

Rated : M15+ Run Time : 115 mins Made : 2000

Distributor : Columbia TriStar Home Entertainment

F: DL | A: DD 5.1 | V: W/S 16:9 | R: 2.35:1 | L: English, Mandarin | S: Eng, Pol, Hun, Cz, Tur, Por, Heb, Hin, Bul, Gr, Ar

THE FILM: Attempting to reclaim a stolen sword, a pair of martial arts legends enter a conflict that will test their both their skill and feelings for each other.

Western audiences had long regarded Asian cinema as little more than a curiosity. Then along came John Woo's furious actioners *Hard Boiled* and *The Killer* and a move into mainstream by HK stars like Jackie Chan and Jet Li that made people sit up and take notice. The kinetic kung-fu trademark of the Asian action flick began to make its presence felt in Hollywood blockbusters like *The Matrix* and *Charlie's Angels* and suddenly audiences went mental for all things Oriental.

Enter *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*.

A spectacular fusion of simplistic storytelling and stunningly choreographed martial arts manoeuvres set against the sumptuous backdrop of China's Qing Dynasty, the title refers to those invisible undercurrents that occur beneath an ordered society.

The theft of a magical sword, The Green Destiny, reunites a pair of former lovers and legends - the wise Wudang master Li Mu Bai (Chow Yun Fat) and Yu Shu Lien (Michelle Yeoh) - and entangles them in a conflict that will test both their fighting prowess and feelings for each other. The thief is Jen Yu (Zhang Ziyi), a strong willed girl who becomes a crucial participant in the events that unfold. Bound by an arranged marriage, her heart belongs to another while her mind craves the metaphysical enlightenment that comes with the art of Wudang. A fiery youngster with an intense passionate quality, in essence, she is the enigmatic "Hidden Dragon" of the film's title.

Director Ang Lee's eclectic body of work had brought him tremendous acclaim as both a visual stylist and master of melodrama. From adult arthouse (*Eat Drink Man Woman*,

The Ice Storm) to Jane Austen (*Sense & Sensibility*), Lee's versatility would serve him so exquisitely in the realisation of his childhood passion - a martial arts spectacle with emotional resonance.

Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon, challenges the distinctive themes that govern the martial arts genre. Most chop-socky is preoccupied with loyalty, honour and tradition, and while the film's characters possess such traits they also fight emotional battles. The unrequited love between Li Mu Bai and Yu Shu Lien and the torrid romance between Jen Yu and her dashing desert bandit Lo (Chang Chen) elevate the film into the realms of grand romantic adventure. The film might almost be described as *Sense and Sensibility* with Kung Fu, in the sense that it explores the relationships between individual freedom and a society that seeks to repress the aspirations of its female members. That said, it's such a joy that most of the breathtaking duels occur between leading ladies Michelle Yeoh and Zhang Ziyi.

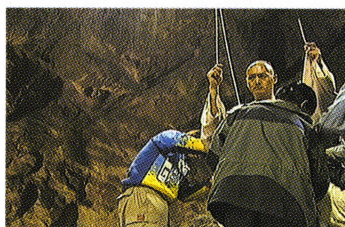
Winner of four Academy Awards - Best Foreign Language Film, Original Score and Cinematography, Art Direction - *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* broke the subtitled barrier into must-see mainstream to become one of the most successful foreign films to date.

THE MENU: Swords raised, Yu Shu Lien and Jen Yu assume the stance and prepare for battle.

THE EXTRAS: Prior to exploring the many extras provided, it's important to note that the DVD of *Crouching Tiger*,



The man from Taiwan, versatile director Ang Lee



Chow Yun fat is wired up



A spectacular fusion of simplistic storytelling and exquisitely choreographed martial arts manoeuvres...



R4 REVIEWS

Hidden Dragon offers both English language and original Mandarin/English subtitled version as presented in cinemas. While a dubbed alternative might sound like the ultimate indignity, the English language syncing is remarkably good, although the translation is less rich and more simplistic. Select the dubbed version with the English subtitle option and you'll see what we mean.

Director Ang Lee is joined by writer/producer James

the title refers to those invisible undercurrents that occur beneath an ordered society

Schamus for a relaxed, screen specific **audio commentary**. Topics discussed include the major differences between East and West action films, translating the screenplay while adding cultural flavour, the transcendental nature of Wudang vs the tougher Shaolin, classic kung-fu clichés, shooting the fight sequences and more. The pair enjoy an easy rapport with Schamus ever quick to remind Lee of his cinematic trademarks - "I'm repressed, I'm in an Ang Lee movie...I'll find freedom with a sword!" **Unleashing Dragons - The Making of Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon** is a well produced, 20 min featurette that explores the themes inherent in the film, the intrinsic relationship between the characters, and the lethal ballet of the martial arts sequences.

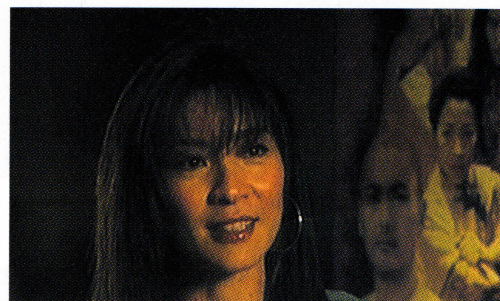
In a series of interviews with cast and crew, Chow Yun Fat describes the difficult job of balancing the physical with the dramatic, Michelle Yeoh praises action choreographer Yuen Wo-Ping and his "sadistic" wire-work, while the softly spoken Ang Lee recalls his childhood dream to make a martial arts fantasy. We also hear from composer Tan Dun and cellist Yo Yo Ma whose thumping beats, lyrical patterns and string motifs resulted in an Oscar® winning score, and sample the theme song "A Love Before Time" by Coco Lee.

A Conversation with Michelle Yeoh is a revealing 13 min interview with *Crouching Tiger's* nimble swordmaster. Her role as a Bond girl in *Tomorrow Never Dies* introduced her to an international audience but it was

Crouching Tiger... that took her to another level as an actress - "This was the movie I had to do" she admits. Yeoh contrasts her prior martial arts action credits with the intricacy of Ang Lee's more lyrical vision, offers character insights, confesses her struggle with the Mandarin language, and reveals the risks involved with fight scenes. An accident during the courtyard duel sidelined her for a knee reconstruction and stalled production.

A photo montage scored to music offers cast portraits, publicity stills and on-set snaps.

The pair of **theatrical trailers** nicely contrasts the marketing angle. The U.S trailer sells the film as an action adventure while the international preview (sans voiceover) entices with a delicious element of



Former Bond girl Michelle Yeoh confesses "This was the movie I had to do"

exotic mystery.

Additional extras include **talent profiles** and cross promo trailers for further Columbia product - *Vertical Limit* and *Not One Less*.

BEST BIT:
Like a whirling dervish, Jen Yu takes on a tavern full of big guys and emerges the victor.

VERDICT:
That this disc will be an essential purchase for all DVD buffs is as satisfying as seeing a suburban multiplex crowd queuing for a subtitled film. OK, so the flashback is too long and the treetop fighting a little silly, but *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* is undoubtedly one of this year's finest film experiences and this gorgeous widescreen transfer brings it home in style. Must see and must have.



THE QING DYNASTY

Want to impress your film-going mates with your encyclopedic knowledge of Chinese history? Well look no further than our potted guide to the Qing Dynasty - you know - that fabulous time in history when *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* is set. We've done the research so that you can drop in comments like "of course during the reigns of Kangxi and Qianlong the Qing government annihilated the separatist forces of Wu Sangui, strengthening its borders and stabilizing the country's frontiers".

There is always the chance some smarty breeches might say that although the film is set around 300 years ago it clearly exists in a time that never happened - what with all that magic and stuff.

But you'll know better. Just look at them pityingly and turn away.

So here goes, Region 4's historical guide to *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*.

As we've mentioned, the film is set around three hundred years ago, during the Qing Dynasty, the last feudal dynasty in China. This dynasty was founded by a chieftain of the Manchu, a Chinese people from Manchuria, the area of north-east of China now called Dongbei.

The dynasty began in 1644 when Shi Zu occupied Beijing, defeating Li Zi Cheng. Qing Shi Zu then set up a system of control over the whole country, basing most of his policies on those of the Ming Dynasty, except of course now the Manchu nobility was in control. Military and important administrative decisions were made by the Conference of the Princes Regent, whose powers surpassed even the cabinet and the six ministries.

This period was only the second time when the whole of China was ruled by foreigners. The first was during the Yuan Dynasty under Mongol rule.

The reigns of Qing Shi Zu and the next two emperors, Qing Sheng Zu (Kang Xi: 1662-1723AD) and Qing Shi Zong (Yong Zheng: 1723-1736AD) were a time of peace and prosperity for China, a stability that spanned 133 years during which the Qing government annihilated separatist forces and strengthened its control over the border regions and the country's frontiers.

The Qing also had one of the most successful military organisations in the world. Their troops were organised under eight banners which soon grew to 24. Each was a separate unit and the fighting men were personally attached to the Emperor to the extent that he owned them. They were fiercely loyal to the Emperor and from among their ranks many civil bureaucrats were chosen.

The country enjoyed a period of national strength and Han and ethnic minorities even fought shoulder to shoulder against foreign invaders to safeguard their unity.

The Manchus did not break with Chinese traditions, unlike the Mongols in the Yuan Dynasty, instead they adopted the ideology and structure of Confucianism to boost their own authority. They followed the theory that rulers rule by virtue of their moral uprightness and also encouraged the veneration of ancestors and the reading of Chinese classics.

So the arts flourished and basic literacy was relatively high for that time, even during rural areas, but the Qing also maintained their domination of the Chinese by safeguarding their own culture, spending their summers in their homeland of Manchuria,



The Qing Dynasty, not Queen Amidala

which was closed to the Chinese. They banned intermarriage to the Chinese and continued to speak their own language.

The Chinese were not trained as a striking force and Chinese troops were kept separate from Manchurian troops. Commerce and international trade also grew following the ascension of the Qing Dynasty. Taxes were light and public works flourished.

During the rule of Qing Long (1736-1796AD) China's borders were expanded further than ever before and his reign was the most prosperous of the dynasty. However there were internal uprisings caused by the great impoverishment of many Chinese.

It was during this time that China first felt the impact of the West - European influences can be seen in the paintings from around this time.

European missionaries were also allowed into China and they influenced ideas about science, but Christianity was later outlawed when European ships with Christian sailors began looting the

Chinese coast. This decision was also prompted by disputes between the missionaries and the fact that the papal ecclesiastical policy was contrary to Chinese policy.

The British were keen to trade with China for silk and tea but they had nothing that could be easily imported to the East, that is until they hit upon the idea of importing opium which had a devastating impact on China as many quickly succumbed to addiction and farming land was turned over to growing and harvesting the drug to meet demand.

It also drained China's finances as the drug money flooded into British coffers.

So there we have it, a by no means exhaustive history of the Qing Dynasty. Now you can watch *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* with confidence, knowing that you have the whole historical background thing under control.

No, no, don't thank us, it was our pleasure. Really.